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C O N F I D E N T I A L BOGOTA 012023

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TAGS: PTER PREL PGOV CO

SUBJECT: SPANISH CHARGE SAYS SPAIN OPPOSED TO MOVING ELN
TALKS TO EUROPE; NO FARC CONTACT ON SECURITY ZONE PROPOSAL

REF: A. BOGOTA 11926

¶B. BOGOTA 11611

Classified By: Ambassador William B. Wood

Reason: 1.4 (b,d)

Summary

¶1. (C) On December 29, Spain's Charge d'affaires in Bogota said it was not prepared to support moving GOC-ELN talks from Cuba to Europe and predicted the talks would have little substantive result before the May 2006 presidential elections. He said Norway and Switzerland, who are "accompanying countries," like Spain, are more interested in pushing for a European venue. Spain promised to consult closely with the GOC before any such decision is made and is prepared to "break consensus" and oppose its partners' efforts if the GOC remains opposed to moving the venue. On the FARC front, the Charge characterized as "false rumors" press reports that the FARC has communicated with representatives of Spain, France and Switzerland regarding a meeting to "clarify" the international commission's proposal of a "security zone" to conduct GOC-FARC humanitarian hostage exchange talks; no such communications, formal or informal, have been received. The Charge aid the international commission would insist on FARC acceptance of the security zone in principle before scheduling a meeting. Any such meeting would be "technical" only and would not be a renegotiation of the terms of the proposal. End summary.

Spain Supports GOC's Venue for ELN Talks

¶2. (C) Spanish Charge Pablo Gomez de Olea told D/Polcouns December 29 Spain would follow the GOC's lead with regard to the venue of the GOC-ELN talks and would oppose efforts of fellow "accompanying countries" Norway and Switzerland to move the talks to Europe. Gomez de Olea said the ELN is interested in European talks to boost its image, because it believes the EU would likely have to alter in some fashion the ELN's "terrorist" designation for the talks to take

place. Even if they took place in Norway or Switzerland, which are not EU members, it is likely the ELN would have to pass through an EU member state en route, hence the importance of EU security guarantees. For its part, Spain would not petition the EU for such guarantees. Gomez de Olea said Spain could not stop Switzerland, for example, from offering to host talks in Bern and flying the ELN direct to Switzerland, but would oppose any such decision.

Talks Off to Good Start, Must Define Agenda, Roles

¶13. (C) Gomez de Olea, who attended the talks in Havana, said they got off to a good start but (not too surprisingly) did not develop into concrete negotiations (ref A). He said when they resume in Havana in January the negotiators must define an agenda and determine the role they wish the civil society guarantors and the "accompanying countries" to play. Spain considers the guarantors to have worked hard and successfully to get the talks started, but the discussions are now between the GOC and the ELN (especially at the negotiating table itself), with limited outside involvement. Spain would oppose one country assuming "more serious" responsibilities than the others, or an effort to parcel out different responsibilities to each country. In Spain's view, "accompanying countries" and guarantors should be careful not to get too involved without the explicit consent of the parties. (He noted that at least two of the guarantors seem poised to enter electoral politics in 2006 on the side of leftist candidates, which could complicate their role as guarantors.) Gomez de Olea said he doubts the talks would have serious substantive results before the May 2006 presidential elections.

¶14. (C) Gomez de Olea said Cuba's role in the talks is minimal but could increase. In his view, Cuba considers its hosting as a "necessary evil" and is likely waiting to see how the process unfolds before defining its future participation. According to the Charge, the GOC is pleased with the Havana venue because there are no civil society or media groups to worry about, its Ambassador to Cuba is excellent (Fernando Londono), and it strongly opposes a European venue because it would require an EU decision to soften the ELN's designation as a terrorist group.

No FARC Communication

¶15. (C) Gomez de Olea said neither Spain, France, nor Switzerland have received a communication from the FARC regarding the international commission proposal of a "security zone" to conduct humanitarian exchange talks (ref B). Press reports to the contrary are "false rumors." (The latest such report says ambassadors from the respective countries have agreed to meet the FARC in Colombia January 9-11.) Gomez de Olea said Spain, France, and Switzerland would insist the FARC accept the international commission proposal, at least in principle, before agreeing to any such meeting with the FARC. If a meeting is scheduled, it would be with the commission's technical committee only and would not be devoted to renegotiating the security zone proposal.

Comment

¶16. (C) We are not confident that the Spanish Charge's excellent approach would survive a French-Swiss push to the Zapatero government to move the talks. The Colombians see transfer to Europe as a key concession and want to get something substantive for it. In a conversation with Peace Commissioner Restrepo (septel), the Ambassador said that the U.S. could only accept transfer of the talks to Europe if the GOC explicitly called for it as part of a peace process, as opposed to transfer reflecting a weakening of the European designation of the ELN as a terror group.

WOOD